



# State warns of toxins in Piscataway fish

By Bridget Malone

STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The ban on eating fish caught in New Market Pond and the Bound Brook is "a cause for concern, but certainly not alarm," Piscataway Mayor Helen Merolla said yesterday.

"We're asking the people to be reasonable," she said. "We're not telling them not to fish, but not to eat the fish."

Federal and state environmental officials gathered near the pond yesterday to warn that it is not safe to

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LOUIS CHIPPENDALE,  
Piscataway

eat fish caught there — or in the brook that feeds it — because the fish are contaminated with chemicals from an old industrial site.

Merolla noted that the pond is especially popular with children. Warning signs are being posted, she said.

While the news conference was being held in Columbus Park, Louis Chippendale, 12, and Carmine Matos, 10, both of Piscataway, were fishing in the pond, as they said they do almost every day.

"We catch fish that have algae on them, so we don't eat them," Chippendale said. "We drop them back in the water."

The meanderings of the Bound Brook mean that fishermen not only in Piscataway, but also in South Plainfield, Middlesex and Edison should take heed, officials said.

The environmental officials said tests show fish having polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCB, levels of up to 36 parts per million. The federal Environmental Protection Agency's safety standard is 2 parts per million or less. PCBs are believed to cause cancer in humans.

Environmental officials say the source of the contamination is the Hamilton Industrial Park in South Plainfield. The site's original owner, Cornell-Dubilier, used PCBs in the manufacture of electronic equipment.

Both Cornell-Dubilier and the current owner, DSC of Newark Corp., are cleaning up the site. So far, a contaminated gravel drive and parking area have been paved over. A fence is to be erected around another contaminated area by Wednesday.

Members of the Edison Wetlands Association picketed at the news conference, saying they are upset the state Department of Environmental Protection didn't act when it learned 15 years ago that the site might be contaminated.

"We're hoping the EPA will take the lead with this problem. They have the real expertise," said Kerri Blanchard, one of the protesters. "The DEP has done a very inadequate job. They took samples and didn't say where they came from."

Ed Putnam, assistant director for site remediation for the DEP, said the site wasn't given priority back then because there was no immediate health threat and the agency had limited funds.

"Looking back, it was unfortunate that we weren't able to do anything, but this isn't the only site in the state that required action," Putnam said.

Merolla said township officials will have a public meeting with federal officials within the next two weeks to address residents' concerns.